

**SUMMARY OF THE
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 12, 2000**

The Proficiency Testing (PT) Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference, on Tuesday, September 12, 2000. The meeting was led by its chair, Ms. Barbara Burmeister of the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene. *The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss plans for the PT subcommittee meeting, matrices for fields of testing, status of analyte and method codes, and recent comments received, especially regarding PT requirements for Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) methods.*

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Burmeister reviewed the minutes from the teleconference on August 15, 2000. The committee agreed that the minutes are final. The status of the Action Items is as follows:

- C Ms. Burmeister has been in contact with Mr. Bob Graves. An update from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - National Exposure Research Laboratory's (NERL) review of the analyte codes should be available this week. The committee is expecting minor changes.
- C An update on the PT subcommittee for implementation issues is included below.
- C Ms. Burmeister contacted Mr. Matt Caruso to request an electronic copy of New York's method codes.
- C Mr. Ralph Obenauf continues to work with Mr. Chuck Wibby on standardized method codes.
- C Ms. Burmeister has not yet responded to Ms. Reenie Parris about the Chapter 2 requirements for National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The committee is requesting that Mr. Matt Caruso's term be extended for one year due to the lack of nominees. Dr. Charles Brokopp has approved this extension, but it must also be approved by the NELAC Board of Directors. Ms. Jeanne Hankins requested documentation from the committee which states the reasons for the extension. Ms. Burmeister provided this information to Ms. Hankins.

PT SUBCOMMITTEE FOR IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

The PT subcommittee meeting will be held at the EPA Science Center located on the Fort George Meade Army Installation south of Baltimore, MD, on September 19 and 20, 2000. Mr. Anand Mudambi offered to arrange hotel reservations for the committee members and find out about shuttle information. Ms. Burmeister will forward a list of hotels in the Baltimore area to Mr. Mudambi. Mr. Larry Jackson reported that an announcement was placed in the *Catalyst* publication by Mr. Jerry Parr for laboratory participation, however, no responses have been received. At least 15 people are expected to attend the meeting.

To help facilitate the meeting, Mr. Jackson asked subcommittee members to submit their issues in written format along with possible solutions (email dated August 26, 2000). A meeting agenda was distributed in another email on September 7, 2000.

FIELDS OF TESTING DISCUSSION (INPUT FOR CHAPTER 1)

Ms. Burmeister received an email about scope of accreditation from Dr. Ken Jackson (dated 9/6/00). He said that the Program Policy and Structure Committee would like to develop at least one model of “matrix-method-analyte/analyte group” to present for discussion at the next interim meeting. Since their decisions are dependent on the direction taken by the PT Committee, Dr. Jackson requested feedback from the PT Committee.

Dr. Jackson said that the NELAC glossary lists the following matrices: Aqueous (non-potable water); Drinking Water; Saline/Estuarine Water; Non-Aqueous Liquid; Solids; Chemical Waste; and Air. The Program Policy and Structure Committee’s goal is to reduce this to the minimum possible number of matrices that will still provide an unambiguous description of a matrix-method-analyte field of testing.

The Program Policy and Structure Committee has developed two options for lists of matrices. They are:

1. Drinking Water; Non-Potable Water; Solids; Non-Aqueous Liquids; Air (i.e., 5 matrices)
2. Drinking Water; Non-Potable Water; Solid & Chemical Waste (non-aqueous liquids); Air (i.e., 4 matrices)

Some points of discussion by the PT Committee are:

- The PT Committee agrees with the Program Policy and Structure Committee on decreasing the number of matrices for simplicity.
- The PT committee wants to allow differentiation between potable and non-potable water. Two water matrices are not absolutely necessary, but the committee does not think that the laboratory community is ready for one water matrix at this time because of concentration and composition issues.
- No PTs exist for non-aqueous liquids at the present time. It is an undefined area. There are confusing issues of PT sample requirements and availability for Resource Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA)-solid versus RCRA-water analytes with the current scope of accreditation (program-method-analyte). Also, if non-aqueous analytes are included in the matrix for solid & chemical waste now, they can be separated out later when PTs are developed.

The PT Committee discussed these options and agreed that Option 2 was preferable. Ms. Burmeister will reply to Dr. Jackson and recommend Option 2 for the committee.

Ms. Burmeister also mentioned the possibility of using key analytes in organic analyte groups and questioned whether or not the committee should resurrect the 80% acceptance criteria. She asked committee members to keep thinking about this possibility.

FIELDS OF TESTING ERRATA SHEET

Ms. Burmeister is expecting to receive comments this week from Mr. Graves regarding EPA-NERL's review of the analyte codes from the three NELAC PT Fields of Testing lists. The committee is expecting minor changes. Ms. Burmeister plans to distribute the analyte codes at the subcommittee meeting on September 19 and 20, 2000. The analyte codes will also be posted on the NELAC website, with an announcement under the "What's New" section.

METHOD CODES

Mr. Obenauf provided an update on the method codes. The committee has decided to use the method codes from the State of New York as a starting place for NELAC's list of method codes. Mr. Obenauf said that the list is very comprehensive and just needs to be formatted for NELAC's use. Mr. Caruso agreed to send a comma-separated (.csv) file to Mr. Obenauf and Mr. Wibby. Once the list is formatted, it will be distributed to the committee to review and finalize. Because the list is very long, the committee will not be able to print the complete document for handouts at the interim meeting. However, they do plan to distribute at least the format.

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS RECEIVED

Recent comments have been received from Ms. Jeri Long (Illinois EPA), Dr. Irene Ronning (Quality Systems Subcommittee on Microbiology), and Mr. Steve Nackord (Davis Labs).

PT Requirements for RCRA Aqueous Samples

Ms. Jeri Long questioned what PT samples are required for laboratories using RCRA methods for aqueous matrix (ground water) samples. More specifically, she asked whether the laboratory would need to request that the PT sample for the Water Pollution (WP) program be supplemented with the additional analytes required for RCRA PT samples.

The committee has received similar questions in the past from both accrediting authorities (AAs) and laboratories. The committee realizes that guidance is needed until the scope of accreditation can be changed. After discussing the issue at length, the PT Committee decided to make the following recommendation to the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) AAs:

Laboratories who analyze samples for ground water only using RCRA methods shall analyze a proficiency testing sample from the Clean Water Act (CWA)-Water NELAC PT Fields of Testing table for those analytes contained in that table. For analytes not included in the CWA-Water table, no proficiency testing sample currently exists for accreditation purposes and analysis of a PT sample is not required at the present time.

The PT Committee recognizes that their recommendation may create a problem with reciprocity between the NELAP AAs since the scope of accreditation is currently by program-method-analyte and does not include matrix. This issue may eventually be resolved when the scope of accreditation is evaluated and potentially changed by Chapter 1. Ms. Burmeister will send this recommendation to the NELAP AA Group and will respond to Ms. Long.

Microbiology

The Quality Systems Microbiology Subcommittee submitted recommendations (by Dr. Irene Ronning) for changes to Chapter 2 regarding proficiency testing for microbiological analyses. First, Dr. Ronning stated that the current NELAC standards require PT be performed by program, matrix, analyte (Chapter 2, Section 2.1.3). This requirement can result, depending on the methods for which a laboratory desires accreditation, in redundancy in some situations and insufficiencies in others. She recommended that PTs for microbiology be organized by technique. One committee member asked whether adding a new appendix for microbiology PTs by method was an option. Another responded that there would be consistency issues by doing so. Two options: 1) leave as is for now, 2) require PT by method. Due to lack of time, the committee will finish the discussion of microbiology proficiency testing during our next teleconference.

Other Comments

Mr. Steve Nackord also questioned the PT Requirements for RCRA Aqueous Samples (see above discussion). In addition, he submitted two additional comments. First, he proposed that statistically-based acceptance criteria be applied to the entire PT sample requirements. The committee responded that they have incorporated statistically-based acceptance criteria for initial accreditation. However, after initial accreditation, this method has a weakness. For example, it is possible for a laboratory to always fail the same 10 percent of analytes. A committee member questioned whether this could be addressed using key analytes. Another member responded that if a laboratory can analyze all key analytes in a group, except for one, then there is a problem. Mr. Matt Caruso agreed to write a response to this comment and will send it to Ms. Burmeister.

Mr. Nackord also commented that the time and cost burden of analyzing PTs is inordinate with the benefit derived. He pointed out that his small laboratory passes their proficiency tests year after year using the same methods and analysts, whereas, a larger laboratory may have a high turnover of employees. He also commented that the issue of inter-laboratory comparability of data is not adequately addressed in the NELAC standards. The committee recognizes the cost of accreditation to laboratories. A committee member stated that the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board's (ELAB) recommendation for whole volume samples would be even more expensive. Ms. Burmeister said that she will draft a response to these comments and send them to the committee.

MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE UPDATE

Ms. Cindy Nettrour said that there is no update from the Membership and Outreach Committee.

APPENDIX H (AIR) UPDATE

Ms. Lara Autry provided an update on Appendix H (Air). She said that the Air Source Emission Task Team (ASETT), which is a subcommittee of ELAB, met in August, 2000, to discuss the Field Activities' standards for stack testing. There are a lot of issues on the table. They plan to have a draft standard submitted to the Field Activities Subcommittee by September 1, so this committee will have their version of the draft standard available for the next interim meeting. ASETT will have a chance to revisit whatever changes the NELAC subcommittee proposes, and it should be ready for vote by May, 2001. Ms. Autry said that she does not expect changes to Appendix H. The stack testers will probably have a stand alone standard for stack testing apart from the existing set of NELAC standards.

MISCELLANEOUS

The next committee teleconference is scheduled for September 26, 2000, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. EDT.

ACTION ITEMS

**PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
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Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Ms. Barbara Burmeister will respond to Ms. Reenie Parris about the Chapter 2 requirements for NIST (from 8/15/00 teleconference).	
2.	Mr. Anand Mudambi will arrange hotel reservations for the committee members attending the subcommittee meeting in Baltimore, MD.	
3.	Ms. Burmeister will reply to Dr. Ken Jackson and recommend that the Program Policy and Structure Committee use "Option 2" for the fields of testing matrices.	
4.	Mr. Matt Caruso will send a copy of New York's method codes in comma-separated (.csv) format to Mr. Ralph Obenauf and Mr. Chuck Wibby.	
5.	Ms. Burmeister will send a recommendation to the NELAP Accrediting Authority Group about the PT requirements for RCRA methods.	
6.	Ms. Burmeister will respond to comments received from Ms. Jeri Long and Mr. Steve Nackord.	
7.	Mr. Matt Caruso will respond to Mr. Nackord's comment about statistically-based acceptance criteria and send it to Ms. Burmeister.	

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PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 12, 2000**

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